

# THE PIGS



Tim Carter

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*The Pigs*

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# The Pigs

by

Tim Carter

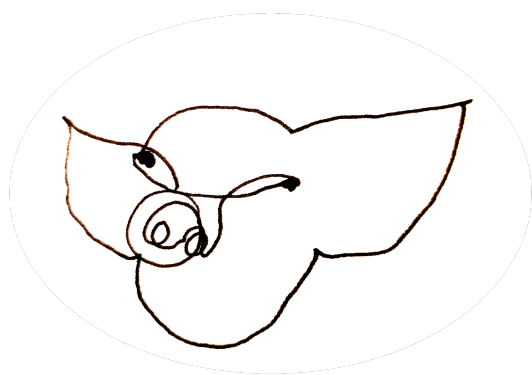
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it must be a blessing

what has happened

there is no other  
way to proceed







Poking a dead thing with a stick. Waiting for the bus to arrive. Wednesday. A dirty pink rag, a tiny dry nose. How old were you when you learned you didn't deserve the rest of your life? Black trash bags by the massive lilac bush. Dew on the hood of the car now gone. Sight is the softest form of touch. Wet leaves in the street, clenched teeth, caged anger. We emerge on the other side of adolescence pretty much the same, give or take an illness, an arm scar, a car accident. What was just earlier a squirrel, its neck broke by a bike tire. Why doesn't joy ache? Why does it not throb for years as pain does deep in your right thigh where you are pressing your pencil? She died, and you didn't. What else could be squeezed out of the rag of memory? School beckons. What matters most is least real. A strand of her hair caught in jewelry. Years later a bit of

her laughter in yours. The cool soothing morning air, the distant sounds of sirens. Arias of teenage pain whistling through your ribs like a bitter wind. You could be forgiven for thinking that you deserved to be happy. Why else be given all of this sensitive equipment? Thinking like holding a bit of raw meat in your hand. How she had washed you in the kitchen sink like a dish. How your father threw you over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. What was, was good. There must be another life beneath this life: endurable, infinite, spherical, smooth. As if hidden in every cell the unscratchable cornea of God. The broken window in your old house, your gashed wrist, an accident. Her running from the kitchen with a damp rag, kneeling down. Where does the self end, where does it begin? We hope the past up. A neighbor sweeps the yellow leaves from her front porch. A shirtless man rides by on a bike holding a dead bird by its wing. Change is often

confused with decay. A dull blue when  
the bus finally comes. Elsewhere, spring  
arrives at thirty miles an hour.

Dull blue a little brighter now. Sounds of  
human whinnying. Hooligans in the hall  
again. School a sort of collaborative hell.  
Identity a cacophony. Hiding in the art  
room basement, learning to draw the  
curtains, the plastic sunflowers in a glass  
vase, the bottle of olive oil. Weeping  
quietly in the back of class. There is no  
such thing as a still life. The kind-eyed  
windswept teacher leans down, explains  
calmly how to draw a hand. Delicate the  
knuckles of angels. The plan in middle  
school was to become someone, they said,  
and everything seemed constructed for  
this purpose. But the self is never finished,  
it is only abandoned. Living an infection  
on stillness. We hate that we must work to  
make sense of our life, to find meaning in

the disparate sentences, when all we want is for it to be explained to us. The same brain that sings tortures. You heard he brought a knife to class, flashed it in the bathroom. A bell rings. A skull carved in the stall door with a ball point pen. The first few lines of the pledge of allegiance. Prosody, suddenly. If you no longer wish to be anonymous, you need only identify with a beautiful ideology. A kindergarten class's windows taped over with brown paper reindeer, pine trees, snowflakes. Little ones eating grapes together in the sun, scratching their butts, rubbing their eyes. Learning how to sing and clap and hide and hug their knees. Hidden in the teacher's desk is a roll of tape, can of soup, boxcutter. Harden not thy entrances, install not a security camera in thy softest place. Are we not born with the same inalienable rights, however fragile, like the right not to be killed, the right to be loved, the far right not to be forced to the ground, or the back of a car, down the

*Language*

mouth of a drain, the right not to be left  
behind, the right to emerge from the  
woods of one's childhood. We arrive, if  
we arrive at all, late to class, smeared with  
the honey of a life for which we didn't ask.  
The best prisons are built with the best  
intentions. Silent reading, behavior  
management, a broken radiator, a  
flickering fluorescent promise. A little  
button on the wall calls an officer who  
comes and rips the black girl in the third  
row from her seat by her braids. Where  
does the self end? Where does it begin?  
Turquoise the earrings of the school  
psychologist. Did you snap that pencil  
because you must, as you say, hope it up?  
What matters most is least real. Orange  
sewage, soggy shoes, honey sandwiches.  
How badly you wanted for your life to be  
a poem: carefully held by someone,  
savored, trusting each moment was not  
just a flow of contexts but was building up  
to something. A bell rings. Who might  
you have been had a teacher not said

*is nothing*

*but a*

*flow of contexts*

those few kind words, delicate as dewdrops? Another angry kid wearing a tactical vest, sunglasses, multiple arms, brandishing an imprecise and wavering motive. Ashamed, the chrysanthemums.

Picking some dead skin in the computer lab, biting your lip, shooting some shit. A kid says watch this “buddhist monk self-immolation video [full version].” What was just this morning a squirrel. While tamping explosives into the cliff face with an iron rod, Gage ignited a spark, which kicked the rod up through his skull like a bullet. Incurrigible, meaning someone who is incapable of change or reform. Algorithms unlike God respond to human touch. Enough slaughter can end slaughter forever. A video of people running from a gazebo at night. A free-to-download manifesto PDF. Keg party, modified assault rifle, the limp body of a

*The self*

*contextual*

deer in a rain-soaked forest, White Jesus,  
that woman senator, more assault rifles. A  
blanket can also be a weapon. A belt  
buckle, bike chain, iPhone, milkshake.  
Books a kind of body armor. Train your  
mind to tackle the destructive emotions,  
tweets the Dalai Lama. Slipping out for a  
sec to get a drink. Down the hall, kids  
form a line holding colorful squares of  
paper, like the oily, sinuous body of a  
snake. Adorable, gullible, holding hands.  
Hunched over slurping the warm and  
tarnished water. Limp mothering body of  
a deer by the road. Screaming must be  
one of the many humiliations. Nerves  
only slightly thicker than a human hair.  
Skin is a form of thinking. You could put  
your pain in them. Music coming from  
the gym. Rows of little kids holding their  
knees, holding the mind still. Synthetic  
feathers, adhesive sequins. A talent show  
a little like getting an epidural. A couple  
of faeries arrive and cover everything in  
sugar. Massive applause, honeyed air. A

*necessarily*

*intermittent and*



tree dabs to his friend in the audience.  
Molecules have no color, and yet tulips.  
Words never actually touch. Giggling,  
belly-laughing, smacking their foreheads  
with the palms of their hands. Bouncing  
off each other like atoms. How many  
muscles in the face? Doubt must be one  
of the body's many virtues. Failure could *insubstantial*  
be its own way out of failure. A spark that  
hits nothing. An iron rod that lands forty  
feet away. First graders losing their minds  
over the dancing bear. Laughing nearly  
exposes the teeth. New flowers in an old  
garden. Wild garlic in the woods behind  
the school. Tamping the frantic slithering  
feelings down was one way. Where does  
the self end? Where does it begin? Missing  
a tooth, he bends down to tie his shoe. He  
probably kissed this morning his  
grandma's blue hand. She was thinking  
of joining robotics. Each night he scrubs  
the dishes after dinner. Carefully, in the  
mirror, her hair. How many muscles does  
a smile require. She was a bit of a

Shakespeare freak, passing notes,  
spreading rumors. Are you having a heart  
attack? God, if God exists, is nothing but  
the unfortunate length of time love takes.  
A bell rings. Slipping out the back, closing  
the double doors. How often do you  
mishear your heart?

Chairs scraping the floor, screaming in  
the distance, the good kind. The school  
resource officer touching the butt of his  
gun. An open classroom door, the low  
lavender afternoon light, an assignment.  
Write about your skull for five minutes  
without stopping. What is also called the  
cube of grace. Weeds now where lungs  
once were. Loud is the body with the  
dead. Loud the head with its clamoring  
pubescence. There is no such thing as a  
life at rest. What Rumi allegedly said to  
his chickpeas: You think I'm torturing  
you, lighting you on fire and mixing you

*Can form*

*make the  
primary*

with spices, but I'm not. I'm only giving  
you flavor. There must be a way to make  
the chaos articulate. A fleck of spit upon  
your notebook. Destiny is the root of all  
cruelty. Not the idea that you will end up  
somewhere, but that you're on your way  
there right now. Even the tenderest plant  
will find its way through the soil, folding  
itself as many times as it needs, until it  
stumbles upon nourishment. Lavender  
afternoon light in a window. Whatever  
hand brushes the dawn, must also brush  
thee, guiding thy trembling hand. Bold  
words, damp horror. Don't you deserve  
love too, simply for having a body? Who  
does not secretly long to read aloud to the  
class? Action only is immaculate. We are  
free to choose, and yet we choose  
brutally. Surely you aren't to blame. You  
are doing the best you can, and with so  
little. You were numb before you could  
even describe it. Pale, wriggling secrets  
that you ate in the woods just to survive  
childhood. The heat you packed in the

*chaos articulate*

sockets of your eyes. The box in your closet with a picture of her laughing by the gardenias. Keep going. Learn to kill your darlings. How did feelings harden into words? How might one's life fail to cohere? Being is a fragile pose. A sort of foliage, inhabited, shifting in the wind. A poem is more precisely flesh than flesh. How did you get here except by leaving yourself behind? Outside in the garden, a bee nearly bowls a flower over.

A bell rings. Bodies crowding the double doors flung open at the end of the day. Buses aligning in the light rain giving the asphalt a sheen of meaning. This flow of contexts never seeming to go anywhere. Walking home. Really, it's a joy to be among others. Kicking over a bucket of moldy leaves, a crinkled hunk of plastic, thick white spit down a storm drain. A throb of consciousness extending only

two or three seconds in either direction.

Prosody, suddenly. Who doesn't want to reach their natural end? Who isn't the center of their own life? You can't go back. You did what you had to do. Now you must carry it until you find a way to put it down. Snails you once saw eating a head of cabbage. A worn old man in a motorized chair zigs across the street, his withered hands, his plastic bags. A train of kindergarteners walking to the nearby playground. Dogshit by the lilacs. Days are always flagrantly confused, feelings impossibly emulsified. Bits of shattered green glass. Gas station, auto body shop, triple homicide. Stumbling across the sporadically beautiful from within the relentlessly unforgiving. Dozens of tiny yellow leaves sticking to your sneakers. A pile of recently cleaned bones. Failure can be its own form of success when it fails to privilege one interpretation over another. A warm breeze then a friend's hand. Home again, home again. Welly welly

welly welly welly welly well. What do we  
have here? Squeezing a dirty pink dishrag  
in the sink. What was earlier this morning  
a squirrel is now nothing more than a  
stain. The mind is its own place, and can  
make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven. A  
bedroom shifts subtly during the day.  
Clothes are thrown on the floor,  
parallelograms of sun. What then really is  
feeling's use? Coughing up in the sink.  
Slouching in the chair. She died and you  
didn't. A squirrel clings to the pine tree's  
thigh as the wind begins, as an odd dark  
glow falls. You go completely numb from  
time to time. If it was going to happen, it  
would've happened by now. What if it  
was just one thing after another forever?  
An episode on psilocybin, the legal uses of  
lethal force. Raw footage. A tattered flag,  
badge decal, skull avatar. What are the  
benefits of diversity after all? Thrash  
metal. Deep fake. A spreadsheet, a litany  
of student names. If pain is distance, then  
love is speed. The problem with the self

*Consciousness*

*pain*

*and its many*

was there were, of course, too many doors. Movie theater, yoga studio, day care, Wal-Mart, a high school. Glad to find at least a few anonymous friends. Asking the tough questions no one wants to consider. Helping shoulder a burden. Slicing apart an argument. The problem with clarity is that it is the most boring part of poetry. Listening to a recording of yourself brushing your teeth, singing a song with your dad, spitting your white mouthful in the sink. You don't want to be forced to feel anything. Whatever is designed to make a person feel only one thing, says a poet, that is propaganda. Pressing the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth. Touching the big koan of pain. Softness a kind of muscle. Screen door, humid evening air. Flute music floating through your neighbor's window. A light rain beginning over the recycling. Adolescence unending.

*diversifications*







## marginalia

Language is nothing but meanings, and meanings are nothing but a flow of contexts. Such contexts rarely coalesce into images, rarely come to terms. They are transitions, transmutations, the endless radiating of denotation into relation. (Lyn Hejinian)

What is more, since the scene of action is contextual and mutable, the reality of the self is necessarily intermittent and fragmentary. The story that results therefore does not have at its center a compact and coherent identity. Rather, it has at its center an unstable and insubstantial unity. (Adriana Cavarero)

Can form make the primary chaos (the raw material, the unorganized impulse and information, the uncertainty, the incompleteness, vastness) articulate without depriving it of its capacious vitality, its generative power? Can form go even further than that and actually generate that potency, opening uncertainty to curiosity, incompleteness to speculation, and turning vastness into plenitude? (Lyn Hejinian)

Selfhood thus may be described as a pulsing “field” whose focus is the body and whose fringed frontier is ever in the process of being enlarged, diminished, reshaped ... Awareness, hence, looks like an engagement at a frontier indeterminately between here and there, I and me, I and you, I and that ... Conscious transactions tend to become stretched-out events, involving some feeling of means and ends. The initiation of a conscious protective transaction is pain. Indeed, it has been argued that essential consciousness ... is but pain and its diversifications. (Horace Kallen)

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Tim

Tim Carter's first book is *Remains* (Tiger Bark Press 2022). He teaches poetry, organizes writing workshops, and runs an after-school program for middle schoolers. Syracuse MFA, 2018. Find more at [www.thcarter.info](http://www.thcarter.info).